

# APPG *for* CRAFT

## All-Party Parliamentary Group for Craft

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 26th February 2025, 6.00–7.30pm

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### Attending in person:

Professor Neil Brownsword	Uni of Staffordshire
Daniel Carpenter	Heritage Crafts
Judith Cobham-Lowe OBE	WC Goldsmiths
Sarah Corbett	Art Workers' Guild
Dr Harriet Deacon	UNESCO Consultant
Lord Freyberg	House of Lords
Allison Gardner MP	Stoke-on-Trent South
Sir John Hayes CBE MP	Chair
Andrew Henshall	1882 Ltd Modeller
Emily Johnson	1882 Ltd Ceramics
Patricia Lovett MBE	APPG Secretariat
Tony Mitchell	WC Plaisterers
Michael Osbaldeston	City and Guilds
Geraldine Poore	Basketmakers Association
Saskia Rigby	1882 Ltd Apprentice Modeller
Catherine Spink	Neon Creations
Tony Spink	Neon Creations
Margaret Walker	Craft Consultant
Baroness Warwick	House of Lords
David Williams MP	Stoke-on-Trent South

### and on Zoom:

Gil Dye	Lace Maker
Dr Chrissie Freeth	Tapestry Weaver
James Grierson	York Consortium
Lisa Hammond MBE	Clay College & Adopt a Potter
Lewis Heath	anOrdain, watch enamelling
Jeremy Nichols	Ceramicist
Paul Playford	Benefact Trust
Roselind Sinclair MBE	Uni of Goldsmiths
Melissa Strauss	NLHF
Dr Rebecca Struthers	Watchmaker
Emma Woodward	Historic England

*Apologies for absence:* Apologies for absence had been received from: Greta Bertram, Charlotte Cane MP, Ruth Davies, Earl of Clancarty, Lord Hampton, Nick Hughes, Ekta Kaul, Natalie Melton, Carole Milner, David Mortlock, Ann Packard, Lord Parkinson, Kibby Schaefer, Derek Stimpson.

1. *Welcome:* In the absence of Sir John Hayes, Lord Freyberg welcomed everyone and opened the meeting. He commented that he did have an interest in the topic as he studied ceramics for his first degree at Goldsmith's University.
2. **Professor Neil Brownsword, University of Staffordshire:** *Stoke – World Craft City*  
Stoke-on-Trent was declared a World Craft City on 22nd May 2024, and is recognised as a fusion of heritage and modernity. However, the problem was that traditional ceramics businesses are having problems, just this month Portmeirion laid off staff, and Burslem has also ceased trading – one of the few companies not to offshore production. The major problem is who will become the workers in the future, how can young people be recruited to ensure the skills continue? The average age of a skilled worker is mid-50s, and it takes 10,000 hours to get to Master status. South Korea and China has support mechanisms to transfer skills, and post-industrial sites have been re-purposed to provide centres for making as well as restaurants and cafés and opportunities for people to experience clay. There are 8,000 ceramics enterprises in Taoxichuan in China, with tens of thousands of workers. Stoke could emulate this, approaching

the ceramic industry and its heritage in a more holistic way. There should be new ways of understanding heritage and a nurturing of curiosity; this should be a feeder for training. Stoke could be a cultural centre for tourism, but with only 10–15 years left for work for the average worker before they retire, there is no time to lose, and perceptions of Stoke having a failed industry need to shift significantly.

**Sir John Hayes joined the meeting.**

*Points raised:*

- Sir John – Emma Bridgewater seemed to be a successful company so why is there a problem? Neil replied that there are apprenticeships available, and some apprentices, but the problem is their staying until the end. Sir John pointed out that these very points were raised in his speech in the House of Commons yesterday, in that an academic career wasn't for everyone and that practical courses and careers should be on a par with academic ones. (*Part of Sir John's speech is copied into the email with these minutes.*)
- MW – Young people watch YouTube videos from a young age and would find Saturday Clubs a good next step to get practical experience of clay. The Goldsmiths have set these up in the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham, and have also developed a T-level. She suggested finding at UTC with an interest in pottery.
- LH explained that his company are now working on a porcelain project but the industry is hampered by items being stamped 'Made in England' even though they're made abroad.
- Sir John said that this should be taken further.
- DC said that cricket balls are made on the Indian sub-continent but are stamped 'Made in England' because they are polished and stamped 'Made in England' when in the UK which is regarded as a significant stage under current regulations. Sir John said that this should be pursued further, especially for craft.
- SR explained that working with her hands was therapeutic, and it presented challenges that needed to be resolved that couldn't be by a machine.

*Before he left the meeting, Sir John Hayes thanked Lord Freyberg for all that he was doing to support craft, particularly by the questions that he had asked of the government. This was echoed by the members of the APPG for Craft.*

**3. Emily Johnson, 1882 Ltd: *The Impact of World Craft City status on Stoke-on-Trent***

Emily explained that she is the fifth generation Johnson and the company was formed in 1882. She went on to say that it is vital to preserve and develop heritage skills. Stoke has potential as a site for innovation but there are redundancies as a result of the challenges to companies, not least having the highest energy costs in the EU. Ceramics are both essential objects as well as special pieces to be used, loved and desired. With 1882 the importance of the human hand is stressed in everything they do, and they sell wholesale all over the world, although trading with the EU post-Brexit is a problem. People don't now want full dinner services, flower vases or pretty figurines, but they do want bespoke. However lately they have made figurines for Jo Malone using traditional skills and painted by individuals all over the city. Design is essential to success and there is a need to be innovative and tell the story of how something is made. The company is now growing with Andy Henshall joining as a modeller in 2022, and taking on apprentice modeller Saskia; Tom is a mould maker and Theo is

training to be a caster. There is, though, no funding and no support for training. The industry needs championing, and there is no AI replacement because each piece is different and made by hand. Stoke is brilliant at what it does and it is relevant.

**Points raised:**

- Lord Freyberg asked where the market is, and Emily answered that it is all over the world, with the future being in bespoke.
- HD wanted to know the impact of World Craft City status and Emily replied that it is a wonderful accolade to have, as it is a city of decades of industrial production but they don't tell people enough what's being done.
- Lord Freyberg said that lots of schools now don't have the opportunity to experience clay with no kilns or wheels, and no teachers with experience to teach it. AG noted that a school in her constituency has a kiln.
- MW suggested taking apprentices such as Saskia into schools to tell them about the opportunities.

**4. Andy Henshall, 1882 Ltd, Ceramic Modeller, and Saskia Rigby, Apprentice:**

*Modelling and Blocking in Stoke and Training an Apprentice.*

Andy is a freelance ceramic modeller working at 1882 Ltd, with 47 years in the craft. He was encouraged into ceramics by pottery classes at school. His apprenticeship was at Wedgwood and he then moved to Spode, and has been freelance for 37 years. Over that time he has trained 3 apprentices, Saskia being his most recent. At one point the industry declined so much that he thought that he'd need to change careers. The demand for training (his first traineeship resulted in 88–9 applications) has dropped completely, and many regard pottery as in decline. China has taken over mass production but high-end design, bespoke pieces are the way forward. Saskia has a career that can't be replaced by machines. Hand-making means that problems are solved during the making process rather than trying to resolve them at the end.

*During Andy's presentation Saskia was modelling, and this, and other pieces, were passed round the group to be much admired.*

- Lord Freyberg said that he was inspired by this presentation and that Andy showed that hand skills were still relevant today. He asked where people who wanted to train come from. Andy replied that they may be artistic-creative such as those with experience of working in wood, all three of his trainees were school leavers.
- DW explained that, as MP for Stoke-on-Trent North he had a background in ceramics and his grandfather was a plater. He didn't think that enough was done to promote ceramic products, and the apprentice levy wasn't being used properly. He pointed out that there was a debate next Tuesday on this. There was also a need to change older people's perspective on working in pottery. In Japan highly skilled creatives are revered as National Treasures but here that is not the case.
- MW said that there was a C&G Generic Craft Apprenticeship which was within 4 weeks of completion before the General Election, but it won't have the volume that is often required for funding.

**5. Daniel Carpenter, Executive Director, Heritage Crafts: *The new EU General Product Safety Regulations.***

Daniel gave a background to Heritage Crafts, explaining that it was formed in 2010

and advocates for and supports the heritage crafts sector. The Red List of Endangered Crafts was the first research and report to rank crafts on their likelihood on being passed on to the next generation. The day before he had been as a joint event with IfATE looking at making funding for training more flexible. GPSR had been introduced last autumn to ensure greater product safety but there was no differentiation between volume and individual items. At a webinar earlier in the year it was explained that there now needed to be technical documentation in each of the languages in the EU, and an EU-based representative who had responsibility for ensuring compliance, often charging a great deal for each item. Digital products and teaching also needed to comply, and there was no getting around the regulations. It was even more complicated for Northern Ireland makers. The implications for individual makers and micro craft business were serious and yet another problem for those trading with the EU to overcome. Daniel suggested that perhaps the government could provide a subsidised EU representative to help this aspect of compliance.

- Lord Freyberg pointed out that the government can't seem to differentiate between mass production and small bespoke crafts, and that those concerned are having individual meetings with minister to try to resolve some of these issues.

- JC-L raised the problem of recognition of British hallmarks which are the oldest and highest in the world, and that makers have to have approval not only from each country but from separate administrative areas within some countries.

**6. Catherine and Tony Spink, Neon Creations: *Challenges to Neon Glass Blowing***

Catherine and Tony explained that neon signs needed protection. Tony started in 1989 as a glass blower and the company set up in Bolton in July 2005. They have another employee as a glass blower. The definition of neon signs is glass tubes filled with gas, but LED signs which require far less skill are being sold as 'neon'. Because they are cheaper they are a real threat to the neon glass industry and the 27 full time glass blowers in the 24 businesses in the UK. Three glass shops have closed in the last 12 months. Their company had 8 employees in 2020, but only 3 now, and there are no full-time trainees with the youngest learner being 29 years of age. They have done as much as they can to challenge companies, and have contacted Trading Standards and Advertising Standards but have had no responses. Their own MP Yasmin Qureshi has been most supportive and there has been some support elsewhere, but there needs to be some sort of certification mark for the real product and legislation to give a legal definition of neon signs, such as that for Harris Tweed, Sheffield Cutlery and Whitby Jet. Neon Creations want to take on another trainee to pass the skills on.

**7. AOB. PL read out an update on the UNESCO ICH Convention from Phil Foxwood:** The responses to last year's consultation are ready to be published, hopefully next month, and inventories will then open for submissions later in the year.

*The meeting closed at 6.35 pm.*